

Message Text

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ACTION EB-08

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PASS ERDA FOR SIEVERING

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ENRG, TECH, UK

SUBJECT: SIR HERMANN BONDI

REF: LONDON 10704

1. ON JULY 28 THE APPOINTMENT OF SIR HERMANN BONDI AS CHIEF SCIENTIST OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY WAS ANNOUNCED. BONDI SUCCEEDS WALTER MARSHALL (REFTEL), WHO RETURNED TO FULL TIME WORK AT THE UK ATOMIC ENERGY AGENCY AFTER SERIOUS DISAGGREMENTS WITH SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENERGY TONN BENN. BONDI WILL ALSO BECOME CHAIRMAN OF TWO KEY ENERGY COMMITTEES -- THE ADVISORY COUNCIL ON ENERGY RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT AND THE OFFSHORE ENERGY TECHNOLOGY BOARD.

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2. BONDI HAS BEEN CHIEF SCIENTIFIC ADVISER IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE SINCE 1971. HE IS A MAN OF VERY BROAD INTERESTS WHO HAS APPEARED TO BE FIRST AMONG THE EQUAL DEPARTMENTAL SCIENCE ADVISERS SINCE THE RETIREMENT OF SIR ALAN COTTRELL IN 1974. HE IS EXTREMELY ABLE, AMBITIOUS, AND POLITICALLY ATTUNED.

3. A KEY QUESTION IS THE IMPACT BONDI WILL HAVE ON NUCLEAR ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK. ONE CAN ONLY MAKE TENTATIVE SUGGESTIONS. AS AN OFFICIAL OF THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, BONDI TENDED TO EMPHASIZE SAFETY AND CAUTION IN NUCLEAR WEAPON MATTERS; THIS ATTITUDE MAY HARMONIZE BETTER WITH TONY BENN'S RELUCTANCE TO MAKE QUICK DECISIONS IN THIS AREA THAN DID WALTER MARSHALL'S.

4. SOME FURTHER INDICATIONS OF BONDI'S ATTITUDES MAY BE GLEANED FROM THE RECORD OF HIS PARTICIPATION IN A SEMINAR ON NUCLEAR ENERGY POLICY CHAIRED BY BENN, HELD MAY 13-14, 1977. (AS PART OF BENN'S CAMPAIGN FOR OPENNESS, A FULL ACCOUNT OF THAT MEETING HAS JUST BEEN ISSUED AS A DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY PRESS NOTICE.)

5. THE INITIAL DISCUSSION OF THE "LONG-TERM ROLE OF NUCLEAR POWER" TURNED TO NUCLEAR SAFETY. BONDI THOUGHT THAT THE NUCLEAR INDUSTRY AND THE HEALTH AND SAFETY EXECUTIVE COULD PUT THE DANGERS OF ACCIDENTS INTO A POSITION WHERE SOCIETY COULD FACE UP TO THEM. THE GREATER PROBLEM WAS THAT OF SECURITY. THERE WERE MANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD WHO FELT THAT THEY HAD NOTHING TO LOSE, AND TO GUARD AGAINST THEM WOULD BE EXPENSIVE. HE WAS GLAD THAT THE AMERICANS HAD RAISED THE ISSUE ALTHOUGH NOT EVERYONE WAS CONVINCED BY THEIR MEASURES. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WE MIGHT NEED TO MAKE EXONOMIC SACRIFICES TO INCREASE OUR SECURITY. THE QUESTION WAS VERY SERIOUS AND THE ANSWER WAS NOT CLEAR.

6. IN THE COURSE OF A DISCUSSION OF THERMAL AND FAST REACTOR POLICY, AFTER WALTER MARSHALL SAID THAT THE SAFETY ARGUMENTS OUGHT NOT TO BE SIGNIFICANT IN REACTOR CHOICE, BONDI SAID IT WAS VERY LIKELY THAT THE FIRST MAJOR ACCIDENT WOULD BE WITH A PWR BECAUSE OF THEIR WIDESPREAD ADOPTION. THERE COULD BE SOME ADVANTAGE IN BEING OUTSIDE THE MAIN STREAM. LATER, BONDI SAID HE WAS UNCERTAIN ABOUT THE FAST REACTOR TIME-SCALE. IT COULD NOT MAKE MUCH IMPACT ON URANIUM DEMAND UNTIL THE BEGINNING OF THE NEXT CENTURY BUT EARLIER DISCUSSIONS HAD SUGGESTED THAT AN ENERGY SHORTAGE COULD DEVELOP 15 YEARS BEFORE. THE FAST REACTOR WOULD BE ARRIVING UNCOMFORTABLY LATE. WERE ALTERNATIVES, SUCH AS STOCKPILING URANIUM OR RECYCLING PLUTONIUM IN THERMAL REACTORS, PERHAPS PREFERABLE?

BREWSTER

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Message Attributes

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